

COGNITIVE FACTORS IN HYPNOTIC SUSCEPTIBILITY¹

ROBERT D. PALMER² AND PETER B. FIELD³

Veterans Administration Hospital, Brooklyn, New York

This research explored the influence of cognitive variables on susceptibility to hypnosis. Gill and Brenman (1959) conceptually bring together the three variables of concern in the present study: automatization, attention, and body experience. Gill and Brenman assume that the ego is originally a body ego, and describe the hypnotic induction as a situation in which *S*'s attention is diverted from distance receptors to the body and its parts in an attempt to disrupt or "deautomatize" the smooth functioning of the ego. Since strongly automatized or overlearned functions might be less easily deautomatized than weakly automatized functions, Hypothesis 1 predicted that strong automatizers would demonstrate less susceptibility to hypnosis. Hypothesis 2 predicted less ability to resist distraction (more interference-proneness) among more highly hypnotizable *S*s, since the processes relating to the control or deployment of attention might themselves be less strongly automatized among weak automatizers. Hypothesis 3 predicted a less detailed, more amorphous figure drawing among highly hypnotizable *S*s, since a definite, articulated body image might provide more of an "anchor" against the hypnotist's attempted manipulation of body apparatuses.

Three pilot studies were conducted, using a total of 50 college *S*s. All *S*s received the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form

A (SHSS:A) or a group adaptation of this test, and two groups also received an inventory scale of hypnotic depth (HD). All *S*s received the Stroop Color-Word Interference Test; *S*'s time score on Card C divided by his score on Card B provided a measure of his ability to resist distraction. The Stroop Test also provided a measure of Broverman's "automatization cognitive style." The second and third groups were given a Draw-a-Person test (DAP), scored by Goodenough criteria.

Results of the three studies were combined by the Fisher z transformation. Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Stroop C/B correlated .34 ($p < .05$) with SHSS:A and .27 with HD, providing support for Hypothesis 2. DAP correlated $-.50$ ($p < .01$) and $-.42$ ($p < .05$) with SHSS:A and HD, in support of Hypothesis 3.

The three hypotheses were tested further using a battery of four verbal and six visual-motor tests on 40 male and 33 female college *S*s. Hypothesis 1 was again not supported. Hypothesis 2 again received some further support, but only among females, where interference-proneness correlated .20 with SHSS:A and .40 ($p < .05$) with HD. Fairly strong support was also found, again only for females, for Hypothesis 3: their DAP scores correlated $-.64$ ($p < .01$) with SHSS:A and $-.28$ with HD. A reanalysis of pilot study data indicated that these sex differences may also have been operative in the pilot sample.

In summary, the hypnotizable *S*'s inability to resist suggestion seems to parallel his inability to resist the compelling but irrelevant response demands posed by the Stroop. The hypnotist's attempts to disrupt *S*'s perception and control of his body and its parts may also be easier if *S* lacks a detailed, articulated body image to provide a counterweight to the hypnotist's attempted manipulations.

REFERENCE

- GILL, M. M., & BRENNAN, M. *Hypnosis and related states*. New York: International Universities Press, 1959.

¹ An extended report of this study may be obtained without charge from Robert D. Palmer, Psychology Service, Veterans Administration Hospital, Brooklyn, New York 11209, or for a fee from the National Auxiliary Publications Service. Order Document No. 01493 from the National Auxiliary Publications Service of the American Society for Information Science, c/o CCM Information Sciences, Inc., 909 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022. Remit in advance \$5.00 for photocopies or \$2.00 for microfiche and make checks payable to: Research and Microfilm Publications, Inc.

² Requests for reprints of this article should be sent to Robert D. Palmer at the above address.

³ Also at the Morton Prince Clinic for Hypnototherapy.